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ABSTRACT

Critical milestones in the university facilitation of meaningful school reform in schools serving at-risk students--schoolwide assessment, cadre-based planning, and pilot testing of new strategies--are examined in this paper. A training and facilitation mechanism developed by the University of New Orleans' (UNO) Louisiana Accelerated Schools Network is described, in which local universities act as change agents in school/university partnerships for implementation of the project. Included are discussions of the change process and suggestions for promoting collaboration and leadership styles, and for developing a training format. Program benefits include university facilitation and dual emphasis on student achievement and professional development. One figure is included. (20 references) (LMI)

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UNIVERSITY FACILITATION OF SCHOOL RESTRUCTURING: CRITICAL MILESTONES FOR ORGANIZATION TRANSFORMATION

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Abstract

Critical milestones in the university facilitation of meaningful school reform in schools serving at-risk students include (a) school wide assessment, (b) cadre based planning, and (c) pilot testing new strategies. These milestones are critically examined based on experiences and observations of two university facilitators.

University Facilitation of School Restructuring:
Critical Milestones for Organization Transformation

INTRODUCTION

The Accelerated Schools Project is a nontraditional strategy for raising the academic performance levels of at-risk students. Developed in 1986 by Dr. Henry M. Levin of Stanford University, this strategy seeks to close the achievement gap for educationally disadvantaged elementary school students such that by the end of the sixth grade, they realize appropriate age/grade performance. This strategy also has the potential to directly impact the high volume of absenteeism and school drop-out rates normally predicted for these children after elementary school.

The project implements strategies which systematically eradicate traditional "remediation" techniques through the creation of cooperative learning activities which manifest high expectations and equally high status for every student in participating schools. Student self-esteem is positively affected as teachers foster the "can do" philosophy of the project. An accelerated curriculum should be capable of motivating and sustaining the interest of all students, regardless of previous achievement levels. It includes concepts, analysis, problem-solving, critical inquiry, and interest application activities which extend across the demarcation lines of subject areas; and it facilities a student-paced progression.

The success of this project is closely linked to meaningful high levels of parent involvement, school-based management, innovative uses of community resources, and the development of a

reliable mechanism of cooperative decision making. Implementation of the Accelerated Schools Project requires that schools develop clearly delineated goals which are understood and agreed upon by parents, students, and teachers.

This paper not only presents the principles and values on which the Accelerated Schools model is founded, but also discusses them as milestones which are reached through a training and facilitation mechanism developed by the University of New Orleans' (UNO) Louisiana Accelerated Schools Project. The mechanism acknowledges that school transformation requires all sectors of the school community--administration, teachers, students, parents, district central office, and the outside community--to function as a "whole" in an atmosphere of mutual trust and collaboration. Where this does not exist, it must be facilitated by an outside change agent. Levin (1988) designed the model such that its adoption across the country required local universities to act as that change agent by entering into school/university partnerships for implementation of Accelerated Schools.

A statewide network of Accelerated Schools is presently being created by the UNO project. Known as the "Louisiana Network," it represents partnerships with various public and parochial school districts. The training, technical assistance, and on-going site facilitation format being used within the network is the result of experience and research obtained prior to the development of the network as the university piloted the model in three schools in 1990. That data demonstrated the need for early familiarity with

each school's culture and systems of interaction among the sectors (Miron, Meza, Garvin, & Allen-Haynes, 1991), and identifies the leadership style of the principal as a major influence to the culture (Meza, Miron, Allen-Haynes, 1991).

During that pilot period, school site training, and facilitation was infrequently provided by a skeletal UNO staff involved in the Accelerated Schools Project. This infrequency was identified as a weakness in university's facilitation and is corrected in the new format that has now been developed.

The authors were involved as student researchers in that pilot test and are now Site Trainers on the UNO Louisiana Accelerated Schools Project Team. The network includes eight schools this year and will expand to include 17 at the start of the 1992-1993 school year. The site training component was designed at Stanford University to accomplish what Levin (1990) calls "...building the school's capacity to change." However, the design leaves the specific format and intervention intensity open to local partnership evaluation and planning.

The format used by UNO's project (as discussed later) is proposed in this paper to be worthy of consideration for use in other areas as it not only provides early identification of principals' leadership styles, appreciation of school's culture, but also uses the information as key indicator of required intervention intensity. It gives a clear reading on each schools change capacity level as they move towards accomplishment of each milestone. After the following description of the model, the

milestones will be identified along with the techniques used by UNO to guild each school's capacity for reaching them.

THE ACCELERATED SCHOOLS MODEL

The transformation of a conventional school into an Accelerated School involves its restructuring around the three guiding **principles** of the model--unity of purpose, empowerment, and building on strengths (Levin, 1987). Through these principles, a pedagogy evolves which considers the total learning environment.

Unity of purpose involves the development of a clear vision of the organizational and instructional framework required to bring students into the mainstream of education. The school's vision embodies the unified efforts of parents, teachers, and students around the realization of their common goals and endeavors.

Empowerment coupled with responsibility refers to an acknowledgment of parents', teachers', and students' capacity and willingness to take responsibility for the educational process. This involves identifying needs, making decisions about how to address them, and accepting ownership of outcomes. One of the building blocks of the Accelerated School model is the expanded role of all groups to participate in and take responsibility for the educational process and educational results. In Accelerated Schools, administrative roles are redefined to include input from parents, teachers, and students.

Building on strengths is a continual process of identifying and utilizing all available human resources within the school and its community. In this process the opportunities for maximal

parent, student, teacher, and administrator demonstration of individual talents is crucial.

The strengths of at-risk students are often overlooked because these students do not share all of the learning characteristics of middle class students. Many of these characteristics are those around which traditional educational success is defined. Disadvantaged children bring assets that can be used to accelerate the learning process. These include interest and curiosity in oral and artistic expression, the ability to learn through manipulation of appropriate learning materials, the capability to delve eagerly into intrinsically interesting tasks, and a capacity for learning how to write without first perfecting the skills necessary for learning how to read (Levin & Hopfenberg, 1991).

The principles and practices of Accelerated Schools are supported by a set of **values** and beliefs which create a visible attitude that is necessary to develop the culture of achievement and human-resource-building. Hopfenberg, Levin, Miester, and Rogers (1990a) describes these values as the following:

> **Equity.** All students can learn and have a right to the best possible education.
>
> **Participation.** Children participate in learning; teachers participate in decision-making; parents participate in school decisions.
>
> **Communication/Community.** Students learn through active group activities. School and community work

towards a shared purpose by meeting, talking, and learning from each other.

Reflection. Students engage in problem-solving and more interpretive approaches to curricula; teachers and parents constantly scrutinize the world of the school and address challenges to improve it.

Experimentation. Teachers implement experimental programs as a result of communicating about and reflecting upon the school's problems; students are involved in discovery exercises.

Trust. Teachers, parents, administrators, and students must believe in each other and focus on each other's strengths.

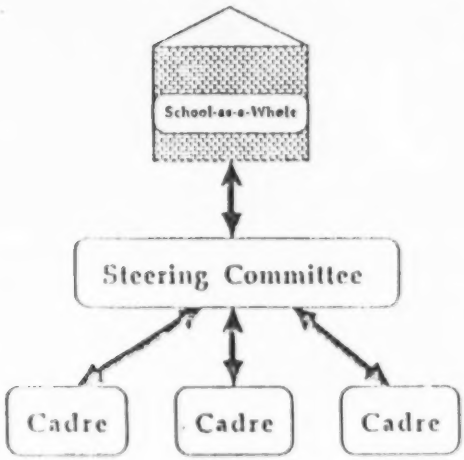
Risk-taking. All parties must be more entrepreneurial in their efforts. While some new programs may fail, the ones that succeed are the key to lasting school improvement. (p. 12)

To support these, Accelerated Schools are organized into a definite **governance** structure which ensures the optimal achievement of the school's vision and goals through total access, open participation, and a continual flow of information. They must, however, retain sufficient flexibility to facilitate periodic self-assessment and modification (Levin, 1989). These schools employ a tri-level governance model consisting of cadres, a steering committee, and the school as a whole.

Accelerated Governance

Structures

School Vision



Note. From Accelerated Schools Training Manuel, 402 S CERAS, Stanford University, Stanford, CA 94305-3084.

Cadres are small working groups of teachers, support staff, and parents who meet weekly to address weaknesses and priority areas of the school's vision. Typical areas include school community relations, curriculum, school climate, discipline, and parental involvement.

The **Steering Committee** consists of the principal and a representative from each cadre. The purpose of this group is to coordinate the efforts of the various groups and to develop recommendations that will be presented to the school as a whole.

The **School as a Whole** is involved in the discussion and decision-making process. Consensus among members (teachers,

parents, administrators) is essential, especially in decisions regarding curriculum, instruction, and allocations of resources.

Change Process

Generally school reform movements have focused on top-down management which excludes teachers, parents, and students from decision making. Research in the 1980s tended to underline the importance of top-down components in initiating change successfully (Cuban, 1988; Boyd, 1989). And, schools in the United States have basically traditionally operated in a top-down manner. This approach to school operation developed a production process (curriculum and instruction) that focused on remediation when dealing with at-risk students (Davidson, 1992). Through this process, some students graduated and some students dropped out.

The trend today indicates that schools are not serving the nation's increasingly diverse population (Levin, 1987; Boyd, 1989). More and more educationally at-risk students are dropping out and those that do graduate do not possess the skills to be productive in the work force (Comer, 1987; Maeroff, 1988). Failure to learn basic skills seems to be the rule rather than the exception among the disadvantaged segments of each new generation. The top-down approach has not been successful in overcoming the educational problems that one particularly severe in heavily minority concentrated poverty neighborhoods in the inner-core sections of large cities.

Students today are expected to arrive at school with the necessary tools to succeed. Yet, many children--especially at-risk

students--come to school with lower measures of school readiness than their non-disadvantaged peers (Goodlad & Oakes, 1988; Maeroff, 1988). To enable these students to enter the educational mainstream, the environment into which they come must be one that will incorporate a comprehensive set of strategies that mutually reinforce each other in creating an organizational push toward raising the achievements of students to grade level.

Recently, policy makers and analysts have begun to champion a new solution for revitalizing the schools. This solution utilizes a shift from the concepts of hierarchical arrangements and fixed division of labor to the theory of schools-based, participatory management and school-site empowerment. The Accelerated Schools model is a process through which individual school staffs build a unity of purpose, undertake responsibility for decision-making and the consequences of those decisions, and build curriculum and instructional experiences on their own strengths and the strengths of the students, parents, and community.

Promoting Collaboration

For a school to move from the traditional mode to a participatory mode, a fundamental change is needed. A school needs to perceive its relationship with central authority in a different manner. The process of production (curriculum and instruction) needs to move from a focus on remediation to a focus on acceleration (Davidson, 1992).

Along with the three guiding principles Levin (1988) identifies, the following set of prominent features of the

Accelerated School have also been observed as crucial transformation elements in the Louisiana Accelerated Schools Network:

1. Group Decision-making. The instructional staff of each school decides the actual choice of curriculum, instructional strategies, and other school policies while still adhering to the guidelines established by each school district. As Levin (1988) explains, "...the decision-making approach is a school-based one in which those who will be providing the instruction will make the decisions (p. 25). Parents, student, and community representatives also become involved in the decision groups. Each school is establishing a program that is in harmony with the strengths of the district and its own staff. As a result, the reform is being developed by those who will implement and evaluate the decisions.

It is crucial that teachers and other school staff work together to shape the programs that will guide their daily activities. Each school has developed a capacity to do this, although some to a greater extent than others in this first year. This participation and accountability helps to make the school dynamic and exciting from the perspective of the educational staff. The cultural change which this promotes is visible through the involvement and self-sustaining activities in cadre and other small group development.

2. Goals. The governing body of each school is establishing a clear set of goals for students, parents, and staff with respect to the purpose of the school and its activities. These goals will

later be refined in conjunction with the school district and school board. Levin (1988) states that, "An over-riding goal of the Accelerated School is to bring the academic performance of students up to grade level to prepare them for mainstream educational opportunities by the completion of elementary school" (p. 25).

3. Pupil and School Assessment. Two types of assessment systems are established. First, an assessment system will be needed to evaluate the performance of children at school entry and to set a direction for meeting the overall school goal. Standardized achievement tests and assessments developed by the school staff for each area of the curriculum and school goal can serve both accountability purposes as well as diagnostic ones for improving instruction. The second assessment system is a school-wide system which measures the progress toward other goals such as student and teacher attendance, parental involvement, and student participation. As the eight network schools become involved in pilot testing and planning, they are beginning to contemplate each choice in the context of these future assessment requirements.

4. Curriculum. The curriculum is heavily language-based, including mathematics. An emphasis is placed on analysis, concepts, problem-solving, and application in all subjects beginning with the early primary grades. The curriculum design focuses on increasing student capacity through providing conceptual and analytical tools in order to enhance the capacity to learn more advanced material.

5. Instructional Strategies. The selection of instructional strategies should depend on those "...that will reinforce the curriculum approach and build on techniques that have shown effectiveness with the disadvantaged" (Levin, 1988, p. 29). Teaching and curriculum approaches are used to maximize the interest of students and to engage them in active learning.

Recent research highlights the fact that teachers in many schools have been told to follow a prescribed sequence of small-step learning of factual material. Such prescriptions frequently have resulted in or reinforced emphasis on low-level learning and mindless ejection of facts (McNeil, 1986). Wise (1988) offers a classic description of this tendency when he portrayed this technique as lending to an educational world in which "...passive learners [are] fed basic skills in bite-sized chunks to be regurgitated on command before the next scrap of spartan fare can be served" (p. 328-329).

6. Community Resources. Neither parents nor school systems have taken full advantage of the benefits of parent and community participation. Boyd (1989) notes that the past and present reform efforts, "...generally have focused on what can be done to improve the schools, to restore them to their presumed former efficiency, while at the same time neglecting vital 'out of school' factors that influence the outcomes of schooling" (p. 2). A recent Rand study concludes that, "A failing urban school system can be turned around only if the entire community unites on its behalf" (Hill, Wise, & Shapiro, 1990, p. v).

The Accelerated Schools process recruits all of the resources at their disposal to accomplish their vision. Among these resources are senior citizens, retired teachers, businesses in the community, social services agencies, and youth agencies. As Boyd (1989) notes, "...the kind of programs likely to really make a difference...require not only system-level support but substantial commitments from the broader community and society" (p. 28). Thomas, Strage and Curley (1988) further note that the effectiveness of the school, and the district, as a whole helps to determine what happens in each classroom. Each of the eight schools in the network have reached out to the community and have received monetary support, needed materials and supplies, and/or volunteers in the classrooms and various school activities.

7. Parental/Family Participation and Training. A review of 49 research studies suggest that even a modest degree of parent involvement pays off in higher student test scores, better grades, and improved attitudes toward learning (Henderson, 1987). Comer (1987) states that, "If fewer parents are intimidated or excluded from the work of schools, children at risk will have added resources, and school people will have added allies" (p. 15).

Parents are deeply involved in the Accelerated School. Parents are asked to provide a supportive role ensuring that their children go to bed at a reasonable hour and attend school regularly and punctually. Parents are asked to set high educational expectations for their children, to talk to them regularly about the importance of school, to take an interest in their children's

activities and the materials that the children bring home, to read with them every day, and to ensure that independent assignments are addressed.

Accelerated Schools give parents many opportunities to become involved. Parents can participate in the governance structure of the school by becoming members of the task forces or cadres and the Steering Committee. The parental dimension can improve the capacity and effort of the child as well as increase the time devoted to academic learning and provide additional instructional resources in the home (Epstein, 1987). Comer (1987) notes that, "Appropriate parental involvement in schools prevents children from viewing learning as a value of the school but not a value of home and community and, therefore, as something that can be rejected easily" (p. 14). In today's society, many children are not cared for or do not live with their parents. Thus parental involvement often times includes more than the mother and/or father of the child.

The increase in the parental involvement during this first year has been clearly visible in each of the network schools. One or more parents are members of the various cadres in each of the schools, parents are volunteering in various capacities on a regular basis, the attendance in the PTA/O meetings has increased (dramatically in some cases), and one school has established a workshop for teaching parents the skills needed to read to their children.

Promoting Leadership Styles

Principals in Accelerated Schools serve as the primary organizer at the school level, become the liaison between the university and the school district, and act as a gate-keeper in facilitating the union of all other sectors of the school community into collaborative relationships. Their leadership styles must either be or must become conducive to the role of "...coordinating and facilitating the activities of decision making bodies. They must be respected within their school district and the broader community such that they are capable of obtaining the necessary logistical support in the form of information, staff development, assessment, implementation, and instructional resources" (Hopfenberg et al., 1990b, p. 17). Among the eight schools in the Louisiana Network, it is observed that these responsibilities are assumed by principals within varying degrees.

Therefore, site training and facilitation plans are developed by identifying each principal's level of capability. It is the experience of the site trainers that the observed levels are also synonymous with categories of leadership styles. Each of the eight principals can be said to generally belong to one of three leadership styles:

1. The **Bureaucrat** who pay more attention to rules and regulations than relationships, and who maintain a sense of absolute control through the enforcement of those rules and regulations, along with taking the total responsibility for

pertinent information and decision-making (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 1991);

2. The **Compromiser** are those who give a great deal of concern to both rules and relationships in situations that require emphasis on only one or on neither: They are also poor decision makers with illusions of control and respect that are not shared by others (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 1991); or

3. The **Developer** who safeguard rules and relationships by motivating others to share responsibilities, and who set high standards that recognize individual differences but also encourage the personal best of each team member (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 1991).

Under the first two types of principals, the interactive system within the school has been found to be a process of traditional top-down management. The sectors of the school community are disjointed and demonstrate no evidence of genuine collaborative relationships; often there is little evidence of trust between them. These schools generally contain untapped and uncultivated talents, lack shared goals, experience poor allocation and use of resources, and are maintained with some degree of resistance to parental and community involvement. Although the various sectors do possess a level of agreement on the major challenges confronting the achievement of school and student success, they still fail to develop shared ownership of the problems and the responsibility for seeking solutions to them.

In schools where the principal uses the third leadership style, the collaborative atmosphere already exist to some extent.

These principals are generally already known by their faculties, staffs, students, parents, and central offices to have a source of motivation. They are active listeners and team participants. They are able to identify and cultivate talents among faculty and staffs, work productively with parents and the community, and can keep the school focused on goals they all agree upon and understand.

The starting point of change facilitation with these principals is most often that of developing group decision-making capacity and refining group process skills. On-site training has a whole-school focus and is aimed at internalization of the model's principles and mechanics of implementing them. In these schools empowerment and unity of purpose has greater believability as they are most often in practice on a rather visible level. The real work evolves around building a school capacity to work through the model's milestones and begin to identify and build on their own strengths.

In these schools the initial training emphasis has been placed on facilitating the development of a collaborative capacity within the school principal. This is done at first through a week-long group training session in which principals are encouraged to personally internalize the Accelerated Schools principles and values by taking personal stock of their own role and contribution to (or the lack of) the present situations challenging their schools. In these group training sessions, examples and case studies are used to illustrate the three leadership types in order

to illuminate the advantages and disadvantages of each. Care is taken to allow principals to draw individual conclusions about their own strengths and weaknesses in promoting and supporting collegiality, collaboration, and group problem-solving activities within their school communities.

Throughout the sessions, the principles and values of the Accelerated Schools model are reiterated as first needed to be adopted on an individual personal level and then as part of a whole school transformation process. Our training format is consistent with the belief that while the principal's posture alone is not sufficient to guarantee change (Apple, 1985), good leaders are indeed necessary for success in the Accelerated Schools implementation phase (Miron et al., 1991).

Later at the school site, as the site trainers develop greater appreciation of the school's working culture, subtle cues are provided to principals in one-on-one sessions for the purpose of assisting them to strategize school-wide inculcation of the Accelerated Schools principles and values. Between school site visits, trainers spend considerable time discussing their on-site observations, reviewing the literature on leadership impact on organizational change, and developing techniques to facilitate all the needed role changes within each school. This on-going collaboration between trainers serves to acquaint each with all school sites and provides a consistency in the technical assistance offered across the Louisiana Network. Additionally, data is being collected which provides possible indicators for early training and

facilitation focus based on the leadership style within a school as the Network continues to expand.

CAPACITY BUILDING

The Accelerated Schools model is not a prescriptive for all schools. Each school will differ according to its unique needs. No one single feature makes an accelerated program but rather a set of curricular, instructional, and organizational practices are used to create an Accelerated School. The curriculum of an Accelerated School is heavily whole-language oriented--math and science included (Levin, 1987). The curricula applies learning to everyday problems and events and focuses on problem-solving and higher order analytic skills (Levin, 1988).

Instructional practices foster active learning experiences including the strategies of peer tutoring and cooperative learning. The organization of an Accelerated School is characterized by broad participation of teachers, administrators, parents, and interested members of the school community. When making specific changes to the instructional program where specific staff needs are identified in the schools, such as planning, whole-language, and/or themetic units, we look at the broader university context to provide the information if the expertise does not lie within the capacity of the UNO team, the school itself or district office. The response is generally on an as-needed-basis as each individual school identifies their needs.

Training Format

To initiate the Accelerated Schools process, each school undertakes a sequence of interrelated activities that take place over several months. At the end of this time period, the school has an organization of smoothly functioning governance groups and the capacity to pursue their own vision. There are three important milestones a school must reach to initiate the Accelerated Schools process:

1. Take stock
2. Develop a vision
3. Set out priorities for action

The first milestone, **taking stock**, involves all members of the school community and explores all facets of the school. These facets may include detailed characteristics on students, the curriculum, instructional strategies, family involvement, achievement, school organization, school history, a description of the local community, and attributes of the school by the staff.

The school staff works together to provide a comprehensive picture of the school. This picture includes the school's strengths and challenges in order to move toward a unified vision and culminates in a report which the entire school discusses and deliberates.

Once the taking stock process is complete, the school moves on to developing a shared **vision**. Generating a school vision is an all inclusive process that ensures coordination in planning, implementation, and evaluation of all future efforts. A school's

vision includes the "dreams" of the school community, the school's strengths, the present day realities, and the future direction. All members of the school community participate in this activity--teachers, students, parents, central office staff, secretaries, janitors, cafeteria workers, bus drivers, and community members.

The third milestone begins once the school has taken stock of itself and has developed a vision. The school is now ready to set specific **priorities** and decision mechanisms for getting from the taking stock or baseline information to the vision.

Most elementary schools can work effectively on no more than three or four major priorities at a time, due to limitations of staff size and time. This step requires reducing the list of what needs to be accomplished to a small number of initial priorities which become the immediate focus of the school. The discussions that result in the selection of the three or four priorities are very productive. The dialogue helps the members recognize the heart of their concerns and helps the staff realize their responsibility for change and for choosing the areas where they must begin. Cadres are formed when agreement is reached on the priorities. Members of the school community are self-select into each group according to their interest and strengths. The selection of the Steering Committee and its functions is the final stage.

CONCLUSIONS

The growth of the Louisiana Accelerated Schools Network is not only indicative of the many schools and school districts that are

actively seeking projects which will help students succeed academically, but is also reflective of the quest of educators to discover programs which acknowledge their professionalism and offer greater job satisfaction. The Accelerated Schools model does both by its very design, but also, its most reported attractiveness lies in the university facilitation. (In mid-year interviews with faculty and administration at each school, the format of the university's training and facilitation was noted as a "plus.")

Realizing this, and with project expansion in mind, the site trainers have imposed a routine of documentation and standardization of service delivery and outcomes. This is a particularly difficult task, in that the overriding philosophy of the site facilitation format is its customized response to each school's challenges and strengths. However, by safekeeping a process which requires that each school develop the capacity and organizational change necessary to work through each milestone, one after the other, standardization can be accomplished. And, by adequately identifying the leadership style change needs within each school, customization can also be realized. Both these characteristics are believed to be responsible for the Network's, and its training format's, ability to withstand local expansion as well as adoption nationally.

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